



LUTHERAN EDUCATION

A Journal of the Faculty of Concordia University, River Forest

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In This Issue.

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Examining the differences between boys and girls is not limited to how they are socialized but reaches into aspects of the emotional and physiological level as well. The article examines how this extends to the teaching and learning of the Christian faith and how the awareness of some unique aspects of maleness can be utilized to do this in the most effective ways. *by Steven Arnold*

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Editor's Note:

The Journal is very pleased to present the contributions of two new authors in their inaugural columns.

Deb Arfsten serves as the director of the DCE program at Concordia University Chicago and in this first special editorial piece, offers some thoughts in the context of being out of context, a visitor in a country to which she has never traveled. By analogy, how much different is it, she asks, for a newly commissioned DCE to serve in a new congregational "culture?" Deb will continue her contributions in "DCE Reflections" in future issues.

Kevin Dunning, Executive Director of Faith Lutheran Junior and Senior High School in Las Vegas, NV launches his "Secondary Sequence" column with observations on the necessity of preparing students for their future—rather than our past—with some observations on the crucial role and differences in learning brought about by the inexorable forward progress of technology.

We welcome both Deb and Kevin as members of the editorial staff and trust that they, along with our "veteran" columnists, will be a blessing in wisdom shared out of their own experience as a thought-provoking support for many others in their own educational ministries.

Here I Sit...A Stranger in a Strange Land

by Debra Arfsten

It was a Sunday morning in early June, and after more than a year of eagerly anticipating my first trip to Japan; instead I woke up with a great sense of anxiety. This was not a vacation trip, but a trip to visit one of my DCE interns, Carol, who was spending 2½ years as an intern/missionary in Tokyo. Therefore, this meant I was traveling alone. The questions I had were many: “What do I pack?” “What will the food be like?” “Will I get lost?” “What have I gotten myself into?”

After a 3-hour flight delay out of Chicago, I finally heard “This is the boarding call for United Flight #883 to Tokyo. All passengers must now be on board.” Okay, here I go...

I had prayed that I would sit by someone who spoke English on this long 13-hour flight so that at least some conversation would help pass the time. I had hope when I noticed my seatmates were clearly not Japanese, but instead were two blond-haired young women...until I heard them speak French and discovered they were Canadian. Sigh...

I had assumed that Tokyo, being a major city, would be fairly tourist-friendly. As I arrived at Narita Airport, I was pleased to see signage and airport personnel who efficiently and pleasantly guided passengers through customs and immigration. After meeting up with Carol, we set out on what would be the first of many train rides in this city. It was at this point that I realized that my assumptions about this city were not correct. All of a sudden, I no longer recognized any words on any signs, nor could I understand any words spoken by those around me. I was the token American in the midst of an Asian culture...indeed a stranger in a strange land.

My week was filled with many discoveries about the Japanese culture...the delicious food (with rice and/or noodles at most meals), the permission to “slurp” the soup as that was a sign

of appreciating it, the large number of people who sleep at any opportunity (in the train, the theatre, the park) due to their hectic lifestyles, the quietness on the full trains since it is considered impolite to talk on cell phones in public, the high expectations and work ethic that cause people to work extremely long hours, the beauty of Kabuki (Japanese theatre), the curiosity of the Japanese people who want to know about my life, the grocery stores with long aisles of rice and soy sauce and yes, plenty of live seafood to choose from, the toilets with “options” and the list goes on...

Yet in the midst of all of the activities and the amazingly large population of people, I often felt a sense of isolation unlike I have never known. I kept asking myself how I could possibly feel so alone when surrounded by so many people? After all, I travel a great deal in my work and have never felt this way before. As I pondered and prayed about this, I realized that I was truly homesick for all that was familiar to me—my family and friends, my home, food that I could recognize, and people I could understand and communicate with. With the exception of occasional email, I was without a cell phone and unable to talk to anyone on the streets because of the language barrier. Indeed I was a stranger in a strange land. What was I supposed to learn from all of this? What was God trying to show me? How was he going to possibly use me in this place?

In my role as DCE Program Director at Concordia University Chicago, I have the privilege of training young college students in their preparation for being full time church workers. It is pretty typical in the early part of their senior year to start hearing questions and comments like, “Debbie, where am I going on internship?” “What will I be doing?” “I’ll go anywhere.” “I feel totally ready for this.” However, it’s not long before those same comments turn into, “Debbie, I don’t think I’m ready for this.” “Are you sure I should go?” “Where are you sending me?” “Did I really say I’d go anywhere?”

Placement day arrives with much excitement in the air. Soon it is time for the supervisor orientation where the teammates come together for the first time. There is a bit of anxiety in the air, but mostly just excitement for future ministry plans. The U-Haul is packed, the installation service happens, and then the early days in the office, which is when I get the phone

calls that say, “Debbie, what do I do now?” After a sigh and a smile, I reassure them and guide them...and let them go. It is not uncommon in those early months to get emails and phone calls with questions not just about ministry, but more so about concerns with living alone for the first time, managing a small budget, being without friends indeed, feeling like a stranger in a strange land. After all, they have just left their “country” (the college campus) surrounded by all that was familiar, and have now entered a “foreign country” (the new church) and having to learn new faces, new “language,” new territory and essentially starting over.

So for those of you just starting out in ministry, let me encourage you and challenge you. First of all, remember that in this new ministry, there is one thing that is always familiar and that is our Lord Jesus. Regardless of where you live, your job description, or your teammates, the one thing that never changes, and never will, is God. After all, He is the reason you are there to begin with, and He has promised that He will never leave you nor forsake you (Deut. 31:6). This is His promise, and God keeps all His promises. When the unfamiliar overwhelms you, go to God in prayer and in His Word, looking for His comfort and reassurance that you are following His will for your life.

Second, when fear seems to surround you, again look to God: Psalm 27:1 “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” He will provide all you need in material possessions, but even more importantly God will provide relationships and friendships that will allow you to fully experience the support of a church in amazing ways. Seek out other church workers in the parish who know and understand what you’re going through. Network with other DCEs, interns or teachers in the area and you’ll soon realize you are not alone. Get out and explore your new community. Enjoy the adventure! Before long, you will look around and see all that God has provided and be amazed at how much this “strange land” has become home for you.

For those of you who have been out for a while, think back to your early days in ministry, and then look around and see how you can help support one of those new church workers in your area. Is there someone who just needs an encouraging

word? How about a good meal? Maybe someone to pray with? Or just a night out for fun? I encourage you to reach out, allow that person to see Jesus in you so that they can truly feel His presence in their life and ministry. Remind them that they are no longer in a strange land, but among people who love and care for them and support them in following God's call.

So, how did I overcome my anxiety and loneliness on my trip? Well, first of all, I openly expressed my fears to a couple of very close friends who not only prayed with me and for me, but also encouraged me with e-mails on my journey. The words of Scripture and reassurance meant so much to one who felt so alone. Second, I kept asking God to show me how He wanted to use me on this trip, and I found open doors in my conversations with not only some of the missionary volunteers, but particularly with a young Japanese woman in her search for deeper Christianity and looking for support from other Christians. Indeed, in my sense of struggle on this trip, God found a way to use me for His purposes. So don't be afraid to ask for what you need, and always be seeking out how He will use you on this journey of faith. Just be patient as His plan always is right.

You now have the opportunity to be the light of Jesus not only to those who already know Him, but also, even more importantly, to those who don't. Rest in the assurance that God has called you to serve Him in this time and place, and He will work through you to enable other people to see Jesus in you. **LEJ**

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Raising Boys in the Faith

by Steven Arnold

Boys are complex. The popular notion expressed by many is that the male is a simple being, but this belief just isn't so. Boys are complex. The complexity of boys becomes even more evident when one begins to look at the Church and the issue of raising boys in the faith. The way boys are raised and the ensuing behaviors developed are many times at odds with the desired outcome of faith formation. Faith formation is about nurturing and developing the relationship established by God with God's people. Faith formation involves the development of an intimate relationship with God that is expressed in love, devotion and service. Many of the ways in which boys are raised stifle the ability to be intimate and certainly limit the ability to express emotion.

To raise boys in the faith calls upon faith leaders to re-visit how the Church has recently chosen to go about the process of faith formation. In addition, to raise boys in the faith requires that one look at the unique nature of boys and their development, and that one explores what boys need in order to grow spiritually and in relationship to the faith community. The nature of boys and their needs must be explored physiologically, emotionally, socially, and sexually in relationship to spiritual development.

Reframe the Approach

Scripture has emphasized a formational approach to faith nurture that emphasizes the relationship between adults and children, modeling an experientially based approach that takes place in the normal course of life. Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 offers one of the most complete descriptions of this formational process by discussing the relationship of the nation to the formation of faith in the children. First, the privilege of forming children in the faith is given to the entire faith community, not just to parents. Second, adults are told that as God is written into their own

hearts, they are then invited to share Him with their children. Now, notice how the adults are to share. The adult community is to share the faith through the ordinary actions of everyday living. The wording in verses 7-9 emphasizes this point:

“Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (NRSV Bible, 1989).

The formation in the faith takes place in the normal activities of the day through the relationships established between the adult community and children. Faith is both caught and taught. It is not dependent upon a curriculum divided into artificial “grades” and it is not always about outcomes established by the teacher.

In recent times the Church shifted from a model of faith formation to a process called Christian education that was based on the educational system developed in the public school movement in the late 19th and early 20th century. The public school movement divided learning up by age levels and turned responsibility for teaching over to those professionals who were trained to teach. The ensuing invention of formalized curriculum and the development of instructional process then led to children sitting at desks that were in straight rows facing the front so that the professional teacher could enlighten the class. The Church then restructured the concept of the Sunday School, modeled after the public school, and graded classes began to develop. Lay teachers were to volunteer to teach from the new Sunday School curricula and programs were developed to help “professionalize” the lay teacher. Teaching the faith became a teaching of religion, and religion became an academic subject taught in a church building. Relationships between adult teacher and student may or may not have existed, depending on the setting. Simply put, boys are not made for this type of learning and thus faith formation for many boys has become dead, sterile and problematic.

Faith...is not
always about
outcomes...

Deuteronomy clearly demonstrates that faith is to be nurtured through relationships established between members of

the adult community of faith with children. Returning to effective faith nurture in boys means we need to reframe our approach, moving away from a Christian education model that teaches religion to a Deuteronomy 6 model that emphasizes formation in the faith. The role of the Church is to help adults “keep these words I am commanding you today in your heart” so that they can then pass them on to the children of the community in the course of everyday living.

The Nature of Boys

Newsweek Magazine reported in January 2006, “Thirty years ago feminists argued that classic “boy” behaviors were a result of socialization, but these days scientists believe they are an expression of male brain chemistry”(p.4). This view led to the belief that boys and girls should be treated the same and that, in doing so, there would be resulting equality. This socialization model has never produced the results intended because boys and girls are inherently different.

Both boys and girls have two hormones, namely estrogen and testosterone. However, the physiological aspect that defines boys can be fairly well connected with the higher levels of the hormone testosterone. Testosterone levels have great impact upon the development and the behavior of boys, causing them to act in ways that are definitely different than girls. Research (Gurion, 1996) has found that surges of the hormone testosterone in the chromosomal boy fetus (XY) affects the formation of the boy’s genitals and the development of the male brain(p.6).

Testosterone is the hormone that gives boys and men the hunting and fighting instinct. In ancient times, when men were hunters and gatherers, it was testosterone that gave them the muscles and strength to fight off the wild beast, or, to be able to run at high speed to escape danger. Today there are few boys that have to hunt in order to have food, but testosterone still affects the body in powerful ways.

Boys tend to be more active and not passive. For boys, the kinesthetic experience is most often where learning takes place. Physiologically, boys are built to move and not to sit. This behavior can be seen in boy toddlers and gets more pronounced as boys move toward puberty. Anyone who has worked with boys who have entered puberty has seen the pronounced effect

that testosterone has on them. In a study by Anderson, Hill and Martinson (2006) exploring the spirituality of younger men, it was reported that, “At puberty, testosterone levels within adolescent males surge to more than two hundred times the levels found in girls”(p.54). The older the boy gets, the more important it is to find ways to be active. Most boys do not do well when expected to be passive for longer periods of time.

Applied to faith formation, the uniqueness of boys means that we do not treat them like girls; rather, we treat them as the unique creation that they are. Parents, mentors and those involved with forming faith in young boys recognize that boys learn through activity. Anderson et al conclude in their study of the spirituality of young men that, “Young men are inclined to make their spiritual quest through nature, sports, and kinesthetic activities”(p.71). In the formation of young boys, pictures and images of nature and kinesthetic activity will enable them to connect more with the faith story more so than a lecture that does not use this type of imagery.

Raising Boys in the Faith: What Boys Need

Boys need to be seen as individuals. While it is true that boys will tend to learn through nature, sports and kinesthetic activity, each will express this differently. Not every boy will be interested in rock climbing or white water rafting, however, each boy will most likely be drawn to images connected with activity. Kinesthetic activity also includes video games and any type of manipulative devices that assist with learning. Boys do need to be active, but each boy will be active in his own way.

...“action talk”...
recognizes the
kinesthetic needs
of the male.

Boys need their voice. Harvard researcher William Pollack (2000) writes in “Real Boys Voices” that boys desire to express feelings and emotions as much as girls do, but the culture takes away their permission to do so. As a result, men are culturally only allowed to express anger as an emotion and lose their ability to speak of love, devotion, intimacy in a vulnerable manner. The culture may say that it wants a man who is vulnerable and sensitive, but behavior indicates otherwise. Men who express vulnerabilities often find that they are described as weak and

possibly not effective. Men learn that it is not acceptable to share such feelings and begin to withdraw and refrain from such discussions (p. xxv).

This impacts faith formation in that men do not have a language to express their relationship with God. Those involved in supporting men in faith formation recognize that men must be taught again to do what was once natural for them, that is, to teach the language of feelings and emotion. Pollack identifies ways in which this might be done to help boys develop their voice (Pollack, p. xxv):

First, create a place of safety for the boy that allows them to speak feelings without recrimination. This is best done outside of the peer group with a trusted adult listener. Boys and men need a place to talk where they feel physically, emotionally, spiritually and sexually safe.

Second, boys need time to feel comfortable expressing themselves. Boys will not just blurt out their feelings as they struggle to find the words that they need to express what they are feeling. Sometimes it is helpful to use the words of others to help boys and men find the words they need. Poetry, music, art are extremely helpful, as are the Psalms.

Third, allow for “action talk” which recognizes the kinesthetic needs of the male. This action talk takes place while walking, running, working on a project, etc. Sometimes it is next to impossible for a male to sit still and have a conversation. Service learning projects have become very important in faith formation because boys and men will do a great deal of mentoring and discussing while working together; much more so than if they are sitting around and talking. A great deal of faith talk can, and will, take place on a hike.

Fourth, listen without interference or judgment. Adults need to learn the phrase used by a good friend’s grandmother; we need to learn to practice “shut mouth grace.” We need to listen, and in doing so, we need to practice effective listening without judgment. While listening we need to focus on body language, posture, facial expression and tone of voice. We need to learn to do whole body listening. After we have listened, we will more likely have permission from the male to engage in the conversation.

Fifth, give affirmations and affection. When boys have risked

exposing their emotions and feelings it is important to let them know that what they have done is an act of courage and not an act of weakness. Boys need to be assured that they are still valued and accepted, even though they may have expressed feelings and emotions that are not normally those of men.

Boys need a cause. In *Wild at Heart*, John Eldridge (2001) claims that every man needs a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue. Gurion (1997), in *The Wonder of Boys*, says it this way, “When we work with boys, we do them and ourselves a great service by opening up to them an equal measure of *adventure* and *mission*.”(p. 43). For the cause to be meaningful to boys the project must include a purpose that is clearly seen and that the boy finds fits his mission. If he sees the purpose, the boy will fully invest. If he does not see the purpose, or he finds the purpose does not fit his mission, the boy will disengage and work the sidelines rather than invest in what is going on.

Boys need a place to exercise and experience personal excellence. Work projects, service projects, outreach projects, all serve to give boys a cause into which they can invest their whole person. Building a model of the Temple in Jerusalem and discussing it while building will allow for the faith talk that becomes natural and meaningful. If the Temple project is going to be used in a larger project for the congregation, the boys will have even greater investment knowing that they are doing something for others.

Boys need a tribe. The fundamental framework for the need from tribe was expressed earlier in Deuteronomy 6, “Hear, O Israel.” It does truly take a village to raise a child, and boys in particular need the sense of working shoulder-to-shoulder with the other men and boys of the village. Gurion states that boys need three families:

Family 1: Birth or adoptive parents, including grandparents raising their grandchildren;

Family 2: Extended families: blood relatives or non-blood “friends,” day-care providers, teachers, peers, and mentors;

Family 3: Culture and community: media, church groups, government, other institutions and influential community figures. (Gurion, p. 59).

These three families are needed to raise a boy to healthy manhood. That is why peer groups are so good for boys, especially if there are adult males also involved in a mentoring relationship. Mentors provide invaluable leadership in the development of male spirituality. Groups such as Boy Scouts, 4H and other youth movements are very helpful. However, as hard as it is to find these days, boys should be with boys. Co-gender groups are just not effective in serving the needs of boys. These families should involve men and boys working shoulder-to-shoulder and functioning as both learning cohorts and work teams.

Boys need their moms and dads in order to experience effective faith formation. However, if the boy is going to continue on in the faith, the involvement of the father becomes critical. In most cases, if dads have dropped out, the sons will drop out. The male involvement in the faith community is essential if we are going to help boys grow up in the faith.

The role of parents is brought forth in the Newsweek segment on The Trouble With Boys:

**...if dadshave
dropped out,
the sons will
drop out.**

“One of the most reliable predictors of whether a boy will succeed or fail in high school rests on a single question: does he have a man in his life to look up to? Too often, the answer is no. High rates of divorce and single motherhood have created a generation of fatherless boys. In every kind of neighborhood, rich or poor, an increasing number of boys—now a startling 40 percent—are being raised without their biological dads.”(p. 4)

The dad is there to provide the male role model, to offer male leadership, and to provide for male connectedness. Moms are essential for the process so that the young man has an effective female role model, positive female leadership, and, a both positive and meaningful female relationship.

The faith formation of the mom and dad then becomes essential if they are going to help shape and form the boy in the faith. Mom and Dad are called to be active in the Word and in the shaping and forming of the faith in order to be effective in shaping the boy. Parents cannot lead where they have not been. Parents need to be involved in personal faith formation as adults

in order to be able to serve their children effectively. Parents don't just teach prayer, but pray with their children at various times throughout the day. Family ritual at the dinner table and at bedtime sets and establishes patterns of spirituality that weave faith into the fiber of home life. The tapestry of faith is formed as faith and life are integrated into the various facets of family life.

Boys need help in understanding their sexuality. This does not mean an understanding of genital sexuality. This means an understanding of the male as the sexual being and how that sexuality impacts thought process, behavioral process, and spiritual expression. Two of the strongest forces in a man's life are his sexuality and his spirituality, and historically these have been connected. It is important to help boys honestly explore their own sexuality, accept and embrace their male body as a gift from God, learn to celebrate their physical expression of sexuality, and understand that this same power force allows them to give expression to their relationship with God.

Rites of Initiation

It has been the practice of many cultures over the ages to have a rite of passage for both the boys and the girls in a culture. This practice has lost much of its impact in our contemporary culture as the passage from childhood to adulthood has blurred. To have a clear distinctive marking of time provides an intentional transition that can lead to different thinking. A boy who has gone through a ritual of change knows that now he must take on the roles and responsibilities of manhood. He still must be mentored, but he knows that now he is to think and behave differently.

The Rite of Confirmation can, in some ways, provide that transition but boys need the faith community to be much more clear about the meaning of this transition. Boys are more visual than verbal. Boys need the rituals that at one time were present in the confirmation service to help them fully grasp this change. Prior to 1971, the Roman Catholic tradition for confirmation included a "slap on the cheek." Lutherans have never really incorporated the practice, but it's meaning should not be lost, especially in connection with young boys moving to manhood. At the time of confirmation, the bishop would slap each candidate on the face. Originally it was not a gentle slap at all. Over the years, it

became more of a symbolic action. The slap on the cheek given by the bishop reminded the candidate that in Confirmation the candidate receives the strength to fight as a soldier of Jesus Christ. This simple ritual serves as a visual reminder to the boy that now things are to be different. The boy knows that from this time forth he is a defender of the faith. Note that this gives the boy a cause, a purpose, a calling.

A Model That Works

The Youth & Family Institute, Bloomington, MN (www.tyfi.org) has established five descriptors of faith formation:

1. Faith is formed by the power of the Holy Spirit through personal, trusted relationships—often in our own homes.
2. The church is a living partnership between the ministry of the congregation and the ministry of the home.
3. Where Christ is present in faith, the home is Church, too.
4. Faith is caught more than it is taught.
5. If we want Christian children and youth, we need Christian adults and parents.

Further, these five principles are implemented within the family through the practices exemplified in the Four Keys espoused by the Institute:

1. Caring Conversations: Adult disciples (parents and other significant adults) and children engage in a safe and caring conversation that includes discussion regarding the faith journey.
2. Devotions: Adult disciples and children engage in spiritual reading and sharing.
3. Service: Adult disciples and children engage in serving the needs of others and reflect upon the presence of God in the midst of the experience.
4. Rituals and Traditions: Adult disciples and children engage in meaningful ritual and tradition that brings the whole person into the faith experience.

The leadership within the family is also a process engaging both adult disciples and children. But, in order to foster the development of these practices, the adults are called upon to live the three essential qualities of a disciple, as defined by the

Institute. An adult disciple must be authentic, available, and, affirming in his or her own walk in the faith.

Forming boys in the faith takes a partnership between home and congregation and a validation from the church that home is church too. Faith formation is about nurturing and developing the relationship established by God with God's people. Faith formation involves the development of an intimate relationship with God that is expressed in love, devotion and service. May we so invest in our boys. **LEJ**

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Called to be Single: Issues and Concerns of Single Women in Ministry

by Sarah Britton and Kerri Rapp

Females in full time church work face unique issues and concerns. Much discussion has been devoted to the life of married church workers. In this article, we focus on some of the topics that are common to women who are not married while involved in full time church work.

Called to be Single

There is an assumption that most women who are going to college for full time church work will be married at graduation or before they enter ministry. Going to a Christian college surrounded by others who have a strong connection to their faith makes this a strong possibility for many women. Quite often this does lead to marriage, but there are also those who are unmarried when they take their first Call.

All believers are part of the Priesthood of all believers. Each one is called to different vocations. God may have called some women to be single. This is something that single workers might not want to hear, but it is God's ultimate plan. It might not be a call to be single forever, but single for now. Diana Garland (1999) says in her book *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*,

Both singleness and marriage can be Christian callings. Both can testify to the truth of the gospel working itself out in the lives of individuals. For many adults who are single, remaining unmarried may not be an actual choice they make but a circumstance they learn to embrace...According to Paul (1 Cor 7:24), we are to live in the conditions in which we find ourselves as witnesses to something that transcends marital status (p. 522).

God's hand is in all things, and he uses education, age, experience, gender, and even marital status to send His priesthood out into the world. God's call is for the good of the church, and the spreading of the Gospel. A single woman may be able to share with people in the church, school, or community in

ways that others may not: she usually has more flexibility in her schedule which may create different work opportunities. This may also lead her to take on different responsibilities at work or accept a Call to a new ministry since she may not have a spouse or children who are tying her to a certain location.

Also, for those newly single or single again, we see the example of Tabitha, a.k.a Dorcas, who was a widow. God used her, as a woman, in many ways. A widow had few options to support herself: for some, their family or their husband's family took care of them, but many women had to find other means. In many instances, their only choice was to become a servant or prostitute. Dorcas was blessed with the talent of sewing and became a seamstress, making clothes for the widows and others. As a single woman God used her, not only as a seamstress, but also to show the power and grace of the Lord. In Acts 9:36ff, Dorcas became sick and passed away and Peter raised her, a woman, from the dead. Although a widow, she impacted many lives, as is shown verse 39 "All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them."

God called Dorcas not only to show His power through Peter as he raised her from the dead, but also his mercy and grace through her love and caring for the women around her. Single woman in ministry today have great opportunities to share God's mercy and grace in different and unique ways. But through all these blessings there are also some hardships: loneliness, over-commitment, and a low personal spiritual walk. This article will look into these issues as they pertain to not only single women in ministry, but to their co-workers as well.

Loneliness

When a woman first starts a new job there is much excitement. She is ready to change the world and be the best that God intended her to be. She gets her office or classroom ready, meets co-workers, and sets up her new home but soon may notice that she is unique: most of the people with whom she works are married and she is one of the only, if not the only, staff member who is not.

Church and school staffs are full of different people in different places in their lives. In most situations the majority of

workers will be married, have children, or have close relationships of their own. In preparation for ministry, students are told not to expect their co-workers to be their closest friends and that they will need to find relationships outside of their particular area of ministry. Married workers have their spouse to lean on; a single person, however, needs to look elsewhere. Women in general are wary of other females and it may take time and trust to build a relationship with another woman. The concern then becomes how to build relationships outside of a ministry.

Find a hobby. Dr. Mark Blanke, Associate Provost at Concordia University Nebraska and former Director of the Director of Christian Education (DCE) program told his students in preparation for church work to find a hobby outside of their ministry area. It needs to be an activity that has a beginning, middle, and end. Ministry is a work in progress, it is ongoing, and “the totality of our task—that of helping people in their ongoing faith walk through the church’s educational ministry—is never finished” (Blanke, M. personal communication, September 1, 2008). Projects taken on outside of work should be something that one enjoys doing that could include other people and that one can complete. Similarly, Olson & DeFrain (2000) suggest, “Try to find something that interests or excites you, and then work at it” (p.149). This is especially good advice for single women not only to enhance their ministry, but also to offset loneliness. Some examples of hobbies include those that are:

- Creative: Scrapbooking is an example of a creative hobby. One can bring memories together and see their progress as one goes along as well as enjoy the benefits at the end.
- Active: Exercising is not only a great way to stay in shape, but also a great way to meet people. If one is a runner, one can join a running club. If the interest is in strength training, one can join a gym and meet people in classes or just during regular workouts. Since this is a hobby that is a constant work in progress it’s enjoyable to make goals and to celebrate when one reaches them.
- Cooking/Baking: This is a hobby where a person can see the result of their work right away. Find cookbooks and look online for recipes to conquer the difficult task of preparing meals for one person. Baking items and

sharing them with friends and co-workers is another tasty way to achieve a sense of accomplishment.

- Sewing/knitting: Many people find that working with their hands can be very relaxing. Sharing this gift with others can be very rewarding. Try knitting baby booties for someone in the church who is about to have a baby, or make a blanket or quilt to donate to a charity.

Get involved in the community. There are many areas where people need help. Organizations such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Boys and Girls Clubs and other service groups exist to bring together willing volunteers with those in need. Volunteer to help with the planning of the city parade or carnival. Find something to enjoy and be surrounded by others who have the same likes and interests to build a better community. Olson and DeFraen (2000) encourage, “If you join an organization, for example, don’t just sit in the corner. Take some responsibility. Volunteer for things; really get involved” (p. 149).

**...it is easy to
substitute the job for**

Find a group to join. Joining a group has a two-fold benefit. Find a group of people with similar likes, and one will meet new people in the process. Many community papers and web sites will list groups and events in the area.

- Book club: This is a wonderful way to meet with other women, and helps grow knowledge of different topics and styles. Book clubs also provide opportunities for activity at home and with others.
- Sports: A church softball team, soccer club, or other sports are great way to stay active. Coaches should try a different sport from the one they lead.

Find a roommate or get a pet. Stan Popovich (2008) author of *A Layman’s Guide to Managing Fear Using Psychology, Christianity and Non Resistant Methods* states that “Spending time with animals can be a great source of companionship. Having a dog or cat can make us feel loved.” This can help offset loneliness by providing someone to come home to who needs to be taken care of. Another option is find a roommate. They do not have to be the closest of friends, but can be someone with whom one can talk. Having another person around might not

take away all the loneliness and missing of family, but it may help.

Stay in contact with family and old friends. A single worker should also stay in contact with family and friends who may not be that close in proximity. In today's age we are blessed with free long distance, email, and internet social communities which make it easier to stay in contact with friends and family. This does not replace the need for face-to-face contact, but can assist when loneliness is at its peak. Another idea is to take vacation with a close friend or family member: Find a new place and go there. There are ways to take a trip on a budget, splitting the cost of gas and lodging in order to help with the cost.

Popovich, goes on to suggest, "Go out and do something that you like to do." Whatever one's interests and gifts, find something enjoyable to do, not just because other people like it, but in which one finds personal satisfaction. Otherwise it becomes a chore. These activities can provide things to do, but also can give opportunities to meet new people, and build relationships outside of ministry. In turn, God can use these experiences to build up the body of Christ. (Popovich, 2008)

Long Hours and Over-commitment

When someone doesn't have a family to go home to it is easy to substitute the job for family. Working long hours and staying in the office longer than necessary or healthy just because you don't want to go home to an empty house can create habits that are difficult to break. It is important to set boundaries early and stick to them. A single individual's time is important, and personal time is needed just like anyone else. Find things to get involved in that qualify as "a personal life." If one night a week is a girls' night out, then it's "personal time." Don't be afraid to tell people that there are other commitments elsewhere. Even if there is not a spouse to go home to, personal time is still important.

Married co-workers may say that they can't or won't do something because it conflicts with their family time. Whether they have a spouse to go home to, or a son's football game, they have family commitments that are easily understood by other coworkers because family is important. People may assume a single worker can be more committed because they don't have a

family for whom they are responsible. In the past, many female single workers were not considered for employment for fear that they would marry and move on or become a homemaker. Today many single workers are hired and often asked to fill in for others because they are not “attached.” Employers may think that because of their singleness (with no husband or children to go home to), they have more time to spend at work (Olson & DeFraim, 2000, p. 147).

Make office hours/school hours consistent and stick to them. There will be situations where longer hours are necessary, but a regular week should have set hours. A person in congregational ministry could work from nine to four, Monday through Thursday, understanding that there will be two evenings a week for meetings and educational time. Designate a “day off” and stick to it. If working on a day off is unavoidable, make sure to take an extra day the next week. In a school ministry, take into consideration after-school activities, know your limitations, and understand the level of commitment. After a period of time this over-commitment may cause fatigue, loneliness, and burnout. It is within acceptable limits to volunteer to teach Confirmation Class on a Wednesday night, but do not volunteer to do something different every other night of the week. Make sure to take not only personal time for yourself, but personal time with God as, the busier a person gets, the easier it is to push this aside because one becomes too worn out or tired to go on.

Spiritual Well-being

Spiritual well-being, or “spiritual intentionality,” is important to all Called workers. Spirit intentionality means taking time to be in the Word, prayer, and regular worship in which the Holy Spirit feeds us and strengthens our faith. This is not Bible study or educational preparation, it’s the time taken to be connected to our Lord and Savior. Church workers spend a lot of time teaching and encouraging others but don’t always take care of their own faith walk.

Over commitment may cause a lack of intentionality about one’s spiritual life. For some workers, being worn out and tired makes it difficult to be dedicated to regular church attendance and time in the Word. Not having a support system to encourage and build up the single church worker may cause low quality

spiritual health. In turn, this may lead to a lack of commitment and joy for doing ministry.

To prevent this from happening, a woman needs a strong faith life. Some ways for a single woman to have a strong commitment to her spiritual walk are:

Find a mentor:

Find another woman, even if she not in close proximity, who has dealt or is dealing with similar issues but who may have more experience. She may be able to give some perspective on things and encouragement in areas where growth may be needed.

Find an accountability partner:

This may be the same person as a mentor, but works better if it is someone who is in the same location. She should be someone to share issues and struggles with, make goals, and encourage in areas where support may be needed. She also holds the church worker accountable to the commitments and goals she has made.

Find a Bible study group:

This may be a woman's group or inter-gender, but find a group in which there is a comfortable relationship. It should be outside of staff devotions and Bible studies. It is better to be somewhere that is away from the day-to-day function as a minister or teacher. The more time a church worker spends in the Word, the more their faith will be strengthened. They will be more connected to God's Word and its message, and better able to share the Gospel with the students or people they work with.

It is impossible to stay the course and always follow through with commitments made to God and His commands. Jesus heals the brokenness and the Holy Spirit continues to build up and guide his children. 1 Thessalonians 5:10-11 says, "He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

Ministering to the Single Worker

The concerns of a single woman in ministry are as varied as ministry roles. The task of working through the difficulties and responsibilities are mostly the burden of the worker. Someone

who works along with a single woman may be able to support and nurture her in different ways. Some areas to minister to the single worker and empathize with her needs are:

- Pray for her: The power of prayer is essential to all followers of Christ. Not only can you encourage the prayer life of a single worker, but also praying for her is just as important. “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” James 5:16b
- Encourage her community life: Encourage your single worker to find people outside of her work community with whom to spend time. It may be the Bible study group at church, a social group, community activities, or with other single female church workers in the area.
- Show interest in her life: Taking an active interest in your single worker may not only encourage her to find activities outside of work, but also strengthen your relationship with her. Ask her how her weekend was or, invite her to cookouts, worship, or seasonal parties. Talk to her about interests and hobbies. This shows caring about what is important to her, offers something to discuss, and in turn, creates a better relationship. (Showing an interest does not include setting her up on a date. Personal relationships are most likely best kept as just that and influence from co-workers may not be welcomed.)
- Listen to her: If a single female chooses to share concerns, take time to listen. Even if the experiences are different, they are valid and need to be treated as such. Whether the issue is work-related or of a more personal nature, she may turn to you in need of a solid listening ear.

Conclusion

God calls everyone to be different, and blesses him or her in different ways. The single woman brings unique qualities and experiences to her ministry. While everyday life may have its challenges, the gifts that God gives to and through her are many and great.

Many of the topics and ideas brought forth in this article were the direct result of a focus group of single women in ministry

during the 2008 LEA Convocation. The women involved honestly expressed the issues and concerns that they were facing in their own ministries. A great Thank you goes out to these women for sharing their experiences. **LEJ**

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Making Policy in Washington: Growth and Refreshment of a Sabbatical Term

by George Guidera

In my career I have observed and participated in educational decision making at the local and state levels in both Lutheran and public sectors from early childhood to college level programs. As my sabbatical planning unfolded participating in the process at the national level was one of the goals. When the National Education Association accepted me as a faculty fellow for the 2007 fall term, that possibility became a reality for me. So in August of that year, I packed up my car and drove east to become part of the Washington beltway crowd for the next four months.

I truly hit the ground running. My first day in the office was the day after Labor Day and the next week I spent most of Monday, September 10th of 2007 in the Labor Conference Room, of The Rayburn Office Building listening to over seven hours and forty-four witnesses testifying on Title I of the reauthorization of the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) better known as “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB). I spent the next several weeks watching and participating in the efforts to pass a revision of the act as legislators, officials, and various interests sought to find a way to pass the measure. When I left in December NCLB was still in committee (as it still is at this writing). But I had learned much about passing legislation and the roles different players have in the decision-making. I want to share four general insights about political decision-making and politics, (as well as life in general), and then some specific ideas about the role of the lobbyist in the process.

Insight: *People often fail to use data to make political decisions.* At a legislative conference, I heard four members of the House of Representatives and two Senators report on what they thought about educational reform. I was taken at how often they referred to their own experiences or retold incidents from their own schooling. They were sincere and felt they had insights

to current problems. It made me consider that depending on our own experiences could be risky or misleading. It made me think of Plato's cave and whose shadows were being projected. Experience is frequently too narrow; part of learning is sharing data and experiences. I witnessed thinking based upon a single experience from the past utilizing the art of the well told anecdote. Americans are a fairly pragmatic people, comfortable in making decisions based on experience. There are a lot of people pushing things in Washington: I saw people proclaiming truth based upon a slogan or a perception not well considered as well as those who see educational theory from their own experience. Virtually all Americans went to school and many think that makes them experts on the subject. We must use evidence and data more effectively in decision-making.

Insight: *Slogans and heroes are the way to understanding?* One slogan in the NCLB revision debate was "pay for performance." It sounds fair. The idea is that teachers will do better if they get a bonus for high student test scores. (I won't comment on

...should we reward teachers with a bonus for high test scores, for...teaching children "in the gap" because those students...are the

the idea except to say that I have had students who would fail the test if they thought it would cut my paycheck.) One responding slogan was, "Kids are more than test scores." Do the tests really tell us what students know? Rather than discussion and

study we listened to "dueling slogans." There is room here for rich discussion, e.g., tests are only one measure, will this extra reward change our schools, make teachers work harder, or make students more successful? The military has combat pay for troops in dangerous situations. It must make them fight harder, better. So should we reward teachers with a bonus for high test scores, for effectively teaching children "in the gap" because those students usually are the residue of prejudice and poverty, which is the key factor in the learning gap? Pay for performance is an interesting idea and an issue in the current debate. But we are tossing slogans at each other, following personalities,

and not really testing concepts or seeking different perspectives. The purpose of being educated is to make better decisions, is it not?

Insight: *Ownership, seniority, and ego* all may play a major role in decision-making and are a major part of decision making in the Congress. The committees one chairs and the seniority one holds may become major factors in decision-making. The power that goes with both longevity and committee assignments is significant. I saw this at several levels in the reauthorization issue as well as other questions. All senators are not equal in all ways and the ability to stop action or block decisions may be a major aspect of this reality. It also allows some to keep issues alive and even become law based on this advantageous position. This can have tremendous significance in current or future issues as legislators and their staffs seem to have long memories and remember both friends and opponents. The inability to get NCLB re-authorized was impacted by this factor as well as other political considerations.

Insight: *There is often more data and opinion than clarity and reality.* When one focuses on a tree one may lose one's view of the forest. It can lead to misunderstandings and poor decisions. I know we all err on occasion and we are all likely mistaken or even short-sighted at times. But that does not mean we are stubborn or evil. Often we simply had different data or experiences and adopted different slogans and perspectives. Educational leaders are concerned about making schools better for kids, but they have different plans to accomplish that goal. Because there are so many ideas in this town and every one of them has an association or organization behind them defining the best way becomes very complex. The truth is difficult to find in all of the plans and perspectives and may vary from situation to situation. Do we want to make everyone the same or release their energy and creativity? Further, Americans love to take sides, decide if something is right or wrong: long lasting dichotomies and our competitive spirit means we fight for our view. Maybe that works well in games and contests, but I am not sure it is the best way concerning more important things. In making rules the art of compromise is necessary, things like releasing the creativity in children rather than drilling them until they hate school. But Americans have a healthy amount of pride

and honor in their psyches; I have even heard it described as our great weakness. So how do we humbly pick through all of these ideas to provide enough light so that we can help children see more clearly? How do we exercise great ideas, and figure out why things are the way they are and—if they are not so good—how do we change them?

Specific insights about Lobbying in Washington

Beyond these general impressions I also observed how people brought a variety of perspectives to the role that lobbyists play in the legislative process. I had my own preconceptions when I arrived in Washington, but I enjoyed many surprises and developed a deeper appreciation of the lobbyist role as well as the complexity of their role in modern decision-making. Chief among them:

1. Not all lobbyists or advocate groups are equal. Purposes and organizations vary widely. The actual lobbyist is just the tip of the spear. Size and scope are significant: That the NEA has 3.2 million members is a powerful reality, especially when they are spread throughout every state and district in the land. These grass-root connections make the NEA different from a single issue based lobby or organization. Still, while lobbying is potentially a powerful force, it is not a monolithic activity that is controlling the legislative agenda. While some lobbyist organizations may appear to be controlling legislative initiatives, others see their role as representing views of constituents and interested parties in the legislative process.

2. Relationships count! It's all about *communication* and *trust*. Good lobbyists are trusted and communicate consistently defensible positions. The NEA, for example, listens to state and local member voices and is consistently networking, listening, and building relationships, all of which are expensive activities. Instant messaging on handhelds is a way of life. At times, this contributes to a difficult and just plain hectic balancing act while sifting through contradicting data. The trusted timely voice is essential and powerful or one is in danger of drowning in the data.

3. It is usually more than the money. I saw that information and program support play larger roles at the NEA than dollars. The checkbook is seldom the biggest stick. Having supportable positions and the ability to share them with policy makers was far

more important than funding. A lot of time is spent on research and sharing both up and down the networks.

4. Grassroots support in influence is a big part of the item above. Delivering hundreds of letters, calls, and e-mails does make a difference. While a letter mentioning the 3.2 million members (all of them voters) carries some authority, letters from fifty of one's constituents is even better. The NEA is a national representative group, supporting the grassroots and research base for their positions. Groups like the NEA or the AARP have a different role than many other organizations. In reality the national office listens more than it proclaims which, at times, is akin to herding chickens. *We gather the data, we consider it, and then support the policies of our members.*

5. It is often political. The major question? How can you help me to be or stay elected? Issues are important but the status of the representatives is essential which, again, is all about relationships. One doesn't necessarily expect representatives to fall upon their political swords for the good of one's cause. One often helps them see how to address the common issues, however.

Most political decisions are better with wide ranging and local voices joining in

Making law is a mostly a long, complex, and difficult road where lobbyists are called upon to present defensible positions conveyed via trusted relationships to impact decision making. The lobbyists I met were dedicated and proud of the work they did for their members. They were providing a valuable and useful service to the process. Finally, for each of us we must remember that there is accessibility and opportunity for all of us beginning at the local or district level. Most political decisions are better with wide ranging and local voices joining in the debate; we all have an opportunity to be a part of this important debate.

The Essential Insight

The current educational debate is huge when we look at the role of schools in our nation. I am still participating in this struggle about how students are taught and what helps them to learn. Will students learn more if we pay their teachers a reward

for that learning even if it is only based upon a test score? Is there only one best way to teach reading? Did they learn more when NCLB labeled schools as failures and then threatened to close them? What role should state and local voices play in policy making? How do we pay for it? What is scary is that when folks think they are right, they don't easily change, but often become more prideful even stubborn in their rightness. It even makes me wonder if I am truly right, more confident, or actually blissfully ignorant about the truth and my own perceptions.

I usually think that I'm right on matters about which I disagree with others. (otherwise why would we be arguing?) In his Gospel, John told us that the truth would make us free. Of course, he meant God's truth, the incarnate Son of God, Jesus who came to reclaim us. So how do I know if my truth is the real truth in any debate? I thought about that a lot during this sabbatical time. Oh, we are taught to watch and listen and to use our knowledge and reason. But can we trust our senses and reason? Many other voices say they are doing that as well, so who is really right? Well we should certainly be thoughtful, but we are also called to gain insight by visiting God's Words of promise and reflect upon its meaning for our lives. We must take time to listen and reflect. As we then discover the message we realize that truth is more than winning a debate, passing our version of a law, making a sale, or even being right. The need is to join the debate, become part of the discussion, and take the time to listen. For at that point we will have something to share.

Being a thoughtful and informed steward is not something one does in one's spare time. It is a vocation. That may be a modern day understanding of what it means to be a person of faith. It is charging into the enemy line when necessary to do so even if success is doubtful. It is standing up for what one believes until one is convinced to question it. But, most of all, it is listening for the Lord's way while listening and praying and studying for the vision and strength to follow it. That is why Christ charged to the cross to fulfill his Father's will, even as his disciples did not understand the truth that made him do so, to become the Truth that makes us all free and right with God. A refreshing sabbatical has helped me to realize this more than ever.

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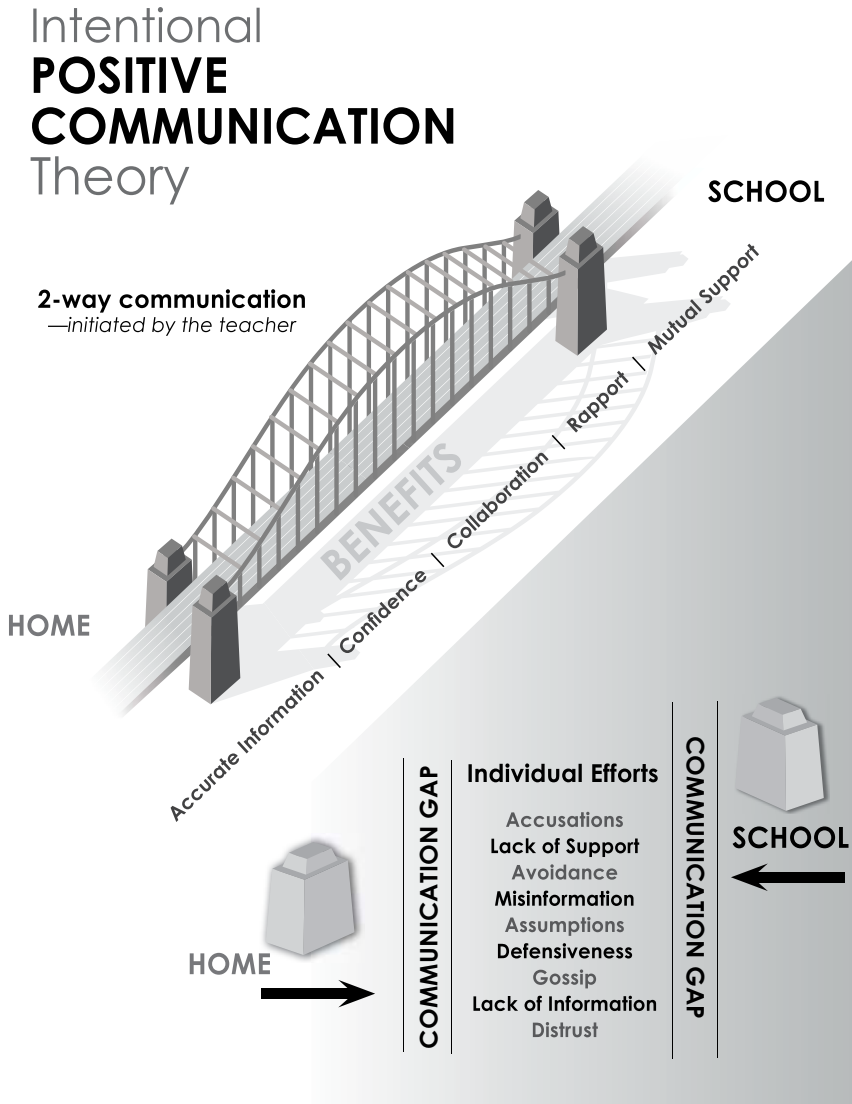


Fig. 1. Graphic representation of Intentional Positive Communication Theory.

Bridging the Communication Gap: The Value of Intentional Positive Teacher-Initiated Communication

by Richard W. Schumacher, Jr.

Effective communication is vitally important to any relationship. If two people, or groups of people, intend to work together harmoniously, they must develop methods of communicating that will bring about a successful sharing of ideas and information. In educational communities, the need for strong lines of communication is critical, especially in the relationships that exist between teachers and the parents of their students. Beyond providing the basic information of what is happening within the school and the classroom, effective school-home communication helps to foster a critical piece to the educational puzzle: collaboration. Unfortunately, the importance of this communication is often under appreciated. In many cases, a communication barrier between teachers and home reduces the chances of teachers and parents becoming the collaborative team necessary in order to maximize the student's educational success. This study was designed to explore methods in which a school could address this issue by developing a process of intentional positive communication.

The researcher conducting this study is an educator with twelve years of experience working in schools, having served as a middle school teacher, and for five years, as the principal of an elementary school. The study was conducted at the school where the researcher was teaching and administrating beginning in July 2006 and running through October of 2006. The K-8 elementary school, operated by a congregation of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), is located in a western suburb of the city of Detroit. During the time of the study, the school had a population of nine teachers, a full-time aide in the kindergarten classroom, and a full-time administrator. The nine staff members who participated in the study worked in single grade, self-contained classrooms ranging from Kindergarten through eighth grade. Enrollment for grades K-8 was 150 students coming to the

school from 101 different family units. No changes to the levels of staffing or school enrollment occurred during the study.

Focus of the Study

Teachers and parents have a common goal of educating students. The parent's drive toward this goal is out of love and concern for the child. The teacher is moved by his or her professional responsibility to successfully do the work for which they have been trained. But in spite of the differences that motivate each party toward this aim, both strive to achieve it. With the ultimate goal being the same, one might expect both sides to be willing to work together to increase the opportunities that the student has to be successful in school. However, this is not always the case. Over many years of actively observing the school-home relationship in varying degrees of success, the researcher was struck by one simple irony: In spite of the common goal and the strong desire that both sides have to achieve it, parents and teachers do not always communicate well enough to ensure a successful outcome.

The rationales behind this communication gap between home and school are numerous. From the parental perspective, parents may feel that the teacher is the professional, and would prefer to defer to his or her educational expertise in all such matters. Some parents fear that any type of confrontation with the teacher might put their child in danger of retribution from the teacher in the forms of unfair disciplinary action, the student being singled out by the teacher, or the teacher holding back from giving that particular child his or her best. This phenomenon is not exclusive to those parents who are inactive in the school lives of their children, although it may be observed more often in those circumstances.

Some of the communication struggles that teachers face with parents stem from their role as professional educators. Teachers can become overwhelmed by the number of parents they serve; it is difficult to get to know dozens of parents and to monitor every student's academic standing while dealing with larger student populations. Some teachers are confident when interacting with their students, but struggle to build the same level of rapport with the students' parents.

There are also barriers that affect the communication abilities

of both parents and teachers. The first is a fear of confrontation. Teachers uncomfortable with being challenged by parents and can grow defensive; thereby fueling parent concerns, who may then label the teacher as unapproachable or uncaring. Parents who do not like to be confronted by teachers may grow equally defensive of their parenting decisions. In fact, both the teacher and the parents will often avoid confrontation out of fear that the other party might consider them to be ineffective in their part of the educational collaborative. Neither wants to be considered a failure in the eyes of the other, so both avoid opportunities to communicate openly with one another.

In a similar vein comes the fear of making “too big a deal” out of a particular issue. Both parents and teachers want to demonstrate that they are capable of handling their responsibilities effectively. Teachers do not want the parents to think they cannot manage a classroom. Parents want the teachers to perceive they are good parents. So out of this underlying fear of the other’s impressions, both parties withhold information and therefore prohibit the beneficial process of exchanging ideas and asking questions.

This lack of open communication has been at the center of any number of problems that the researcher has had to address over the five years he has served as principal. It is not uncommon for smaller issues that were avoided or left unresolved to grow over time and become large problems. Once the situation reaches this escalated state, all parties involved are usually entrenched in their position, misinformed about the core issues that need to be addressed, and disinterested in solving the original problem. Rather, these meetings dwell heavily on personal issues and perceptions. Once this point is reached in a school-home relationship, both parties are left in a mode of “damage control” and, in some cases, blame affixation that further erodes the collaborative process.

Having participated in several meetings of this type with parents and teachers, the researcher began to postulate regarding more effective methods to bridge the communication gap that exists between the school and home. We needed to introduce a process that would ease the tensions of both parties who appeared to be struggling to find the common ground on which they could communicate comfortably. If successful, then

communication between parents and teachers could be more open, more frequent, and provide positive benefits for all of the stakeholders within the school community.

It is upon this foundation that the researcher developed the Intentional Positive Communication Theory. The theory shows the gap that exists between the home and the school, along with many of the common issues that occur within the gap, explored by both teachers and parents alike. It assumes that both the teachers and the parents will communicate in one of two manners, individually or collaboratively. One-sided attempts at communication will result in any number of negative outcomes. These outcomes include but are not limited to the following:

- Accusations leveled against one another.
- Assumptions replacing facts in decision making.
- Avoidance of one another to reduce conflict.
- Defensiveness against what others might be saying.
- Distrust of one another and their abilities to meet goals.
- Gossip designed to gain a body of support against the other party.
- Lack of information, which leads to assumptions and inaccuracy.
- Lack of support—both real and perceived.
- Misinformation that becomes an almost uncorrectable truth.

Collaborative communication will produce an entirely different set of outcomes, which include the following:

- Accurate information shared by both parents and teachers alike.
- Both parties gain confidence in the abilities of the other.
- Both parties make collaboration a priority.
- Rapport grows between parents and teachers, making communication easier and more effective.
- Mutual support between home and school is fostered

While the concept of collaboration indicates that the communication will be a priority for both parties, it is obvious that one of the two groups must initiate the process. This theory places that responsibility upon the school. As the professionals in this relationship, the teachers must initiate the communication. Parents have an underlying assumption that the teacher will communicate with them if necessary. Furthermore, parents who

find they initiate the bulk of communication with the teacher may consider their efforts one-sided, label the teacher as unwilling to communicate, and consequently head straight into the gap and its various negative results. Therefore, holding the teacher accountable for making the initial contact is an appropriate first step.

The theory also stresses that this initial interaction must also be a positive one. Once again, parents already have an expectation that the school will contact them when their child is misbehaving or has fallen behind. In fact, that expectation is so strong that, for many parents, the appearance of the teacher's name on their caller ID is grounds for an immediate elevation of their heart rate. By making the initial contact friendly, personal, and positive, the parents get a more personal view of the teacher. That individual attention will pay dividends in the future when either the teacher or the parent need discuss a more serious matter involving the student. Developing a stronger rapport between the school and the family will eliminate much of the uneasiness that often hampers effective communication. (*See Fig. 1, p. 104.*)

Based on this theory, the researcher looked to find a vehicle by which greater levels of communication between the teachers and the parents could be achieved through an intentional school-wide initiative to be held at the start of the school year.

Literature Review

Parental involvement has a powerful impact upon the education of their children (Ames, Khoju, & Watkins, 1993; Barrera & Warner, 2006; Center for CSRI, 2006; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Freytag, 2001; Martin & Hagan-Burke, 2002; Upham, Cheney, & Manning, 1998; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Hancock, Rubenstein, & Zeisz, 1997; Witmer, 2005). However, the value of parental involvement is maximized when the involvement is developed in connection with a collaborative effort between the parent and teacher. When parents and school work together, both groups gain a greater understanding of what steps must be taken to mutually meet the needs of the child (Freytag, 2001).

Even though the benefits of parent-teacher collaboration are well known, barriers exist that prevent parents and teachers from engaging open dialogue. One study found that the “parent’s

overall evaluations of the teacher, their sense of comfort with the school, and their reported level of involvement was higher when they received frequent and effective communications” (Ames, de Stefano, Watkins, and Sheldon, 1995). Communicating with parents is a struggle for some teachers, especially new teachers whose age and relative inexperience create an intimidation factor that is difficult to overcome. Even for experienced teachers, communication with parents is not always a priority. Research shows that teachers’ use of communication tools is dependent upon their pre-conceived attitudes and beliefs (Ames, de Stefano, Watkins, & Sheldon, 1995). Studies have also shown that school-to-home communication happens infrequently, most often focusing on negative content and failing to establish the meaningful connections needed to build a solid rapport (Ames, Khoju, & Watkins, 1993). Parents want to hear positive news as well as the negative about their students (Freytag, 2001). Teachers should also be encouraged to personalize their communications in order to give it a friendlier and less rigid tone (Warner, 2002).

It must be understood that parents also play a role in making collaborative communication successful. Any effort made by schools to improve communication practices is far less effective if parents are unresponsive or inattentive to it (Ames, Khoju, & Watkins, 1993). Parents often fail to connect with teachers due to a general lack of information as to the best times and methods for making contact (Upham, Cheney, & Manning, 1998). But in spite of the barriers that keep parents from voicing their concerns, their desire to be heard is strong (Freytag 2001).

Teachers and parents both agree that meeting in person to discuss issues one-on-one in an in-depth manner is preferable to a phone call or sending a note (Upham, Cheney, & Manning, 1998). Both groups also agree that, despite the difficulty of make time for additional meetings in August and September, it is best to meet as early during the school year as possible to initiate positive contact (Upham, Cheney, & Manning, 1998). The teachers, however, preferred to schedule a one-time, group meeting for their classroom parents, while the parents favored one-on-one meetings where their child’s unique needs could be discussed privately (Upham, Cheney, & Manning, 1998). Knowing that starting the year with strong lines of communication will pay

dividends for the student and the school community (Witmer, 2005), schools must work to intentionally develop their own method to address the unique needs of each of their families (Barrera & Warner, 2006).

Design and Methods

The idea of holding a Parents Day was developed by the researcher after a conversation held with another educator. The discussion focused upon the distance that often exists between parent and teacher, in spite of the obvious common goals they share. The educator proposed that schools take the first day of school and establish a schedule whereby the teachers and the parents would meet in one-on-one sessions to discuss the upcoming school year. Through that discussion and the feedback it generated, the researcher decided to pursue the Parents Day idea at his school for the start of the 2006-2007 school year. But before Parents Day could evolve from being an idea to event, two promotional campaigns would be required: one to the families and the other to the teachers.

Based on prior experience, the parents would be the easier of the two groups to approach. Being advocates for good communication and activity within the school, most parents would welcome the chance to meet. A letter was sent home to all registered school families in early July 2006. The purpose of the letter was to offer an explanation of the idea of Parents Day: its design, its purpose, and what the teachers hoped to accomplish as a result of it. A scheduling grid was also sent along with the letter, asking parents to list their preferred time blocks to come and meet. This grid was very similar to those sent out for scheduling school wide parent-teacher conferences each fall, making the process a familiar and simple one. Parents could mail the scheduling request back to the office, return it in person, or request their time block with a phone call or e-mail. The school secretary then compiled all of the requests and constructed the schedule for the meetings. Parents were also invited to contact the school or the researcher to pose any questions that they may have. All 101 enrolled families signed up for a meeting time.

Presenting the idea to the teachers posed a different set of challenges. The start of the school year is an extremely busy

time, and adding a full day's worth of meetings had the potential for being a difficult sell. The researcher began his presentation by providing the teachers with research showing the benefits of parent meetings early in the year. Also, knowing that offering an incentive to the teachers would be advantageous, the day was considered an in-service day, returning to them time that was already on the schedule in the form of meetings. The date did not alter or reduce the number of instructional hours for the school year, but left the teachers feeling that they had gained time, making it a "win" for all parties involved.

The design for the day was simple, but required some coaching for everyone to understand the goals for the meetings. The researcher decided to utilize the same scheduling procedure that the school used for parent-teacher conferences. The meetings were scheduled to last fifteen minutes. Parents with multiple students were scheduled to see each of their children's classroom teachers in consecutive time blocks to make their scheduling simpler. The principal welcomed the parents as they entered the building. If they were new to the school, they were provided with assistance finding their child's classroom, the restrooms, the office, or any other location needed.

Once in the classroom, the teachers continued to work to make the parents feel welcome. Sensitive to the desire to make the time positive and beneficial, the researcher was adamant that the meetings would be informal and relaxed. The school provided finger foods and drinks. The classroom teachers were encouraged to provide something homemade as a personalizing touch. Parents and teachers sat together in a circle on chairs of equal size and appearance, with every attempt being made to give the interaction the feeling of being a friendly discussion and not a formal meeting. Each teacher was given some latitude to set the agenda and manage the time as he or she deemed best. The researcher did not endeavor to make the meetings rigid or appear to have a "cookie cutter" feel, however, some rules for Parents Day were established that the teachers were instructed to follow.

The teachers already spend time discussing their procedures, their expectations, the curriculum, their grading policies, and supplies during the group classroom meetings held on registration night. Therefore, the teachers were advised to not introduce

any discussion that would repeat items already covered, nor to discuss classroom procedures. To do so would be wasting time and eliminate the benefit of the one-on-one session. Therefore the teachers were asked to begin the conversations with a request for the parent to tell you about their child and then go from there.

Once the dialogue began, the teachers needed to work diligently to spend more time listening than speaking. The teachers were instructed to give an ear to the parents and answer questions honestly, but to not dominate the discussion. Information was to be gathered about the child and the parents with particular attention paid to information that could be used to make later connections (likes and dislikes, interests, hobbies, allergies, etc...). If the parent had a specific concern that they wanted to address, the teachers were encouraged listen to them, take notes, and offer ideas as to the best way that both the teacher and the parents could address the issue throughout the year. If the answer wasn't readily available, the teacher was to get back in touch with the parent with the answer in a timely manner. The teacher was also instructed to make certain that they related their own contact information with the parents. Some teachers had a small form for the parent to complete, while others just took notes. The information that was shared included phone numbers for work, home and cellular phones, pager numbers, and e-mail addresses. In addition to the numbers, parents and teachers also shared their preferences for best times, places, and methods for contacting one another. When the meeting ended, both the parents and the teacher knew the best ways and times to make contact with one another.

As the day progressed, the researcher was actively moving through the building, greeting parents and thanking them for their willingness to participate. It also allowed parents the same opportunity to speak to the principal and have a sense of connectivity on a school-wide level. In those discussions, the researcher was able to gauge the level of interest and excitement that the parents were bringing into the new school year. It also provided support to the teachers to know that their administrator was also opening lines of communication to the school community.

As the school year began, the informal verbal feedback

from Parents Day indicated that parents were generally pleased. However, the researcher decided to wait several weeks into the school year before sending out the survey to gather specific follow-up information. By doing so, the memory of the meetings would still be fresh in their minds, but their feelings about the year would also be based on several weeks of attendance. To have provided the survey immediately would have produced information about the first week of school before any opportunities for communication were necessary or really possible.

The surveys were distributed to all of the 101 families who participated in the Parents Day meetings on Monday, October 9. Parents were asked to answer questions regarding the Parent Day meetings, as well as questions focusing upon the effectiveness of the school’s communication practices. The questions were plotted on a likert scale with lines provided for parents to make additional comments. A deadline of Friday, October 27, was given for the surveys to be returned. A total of forty-six surveys were returned, providing a return percentage of forty-five percent.

The survey began with a set of questions that specifically addressed the Parents Day event. The first question asked the parents, “What was your impression of the parent-teacher meetings on the first day of school?” Over half of the respondents rated the concept an excellent idea, with another third of the group calling it beneficial. Eleven percent rated it as being fine and only two percent indicated that the meeting was of no benefit. (*See Table 1, below.*)

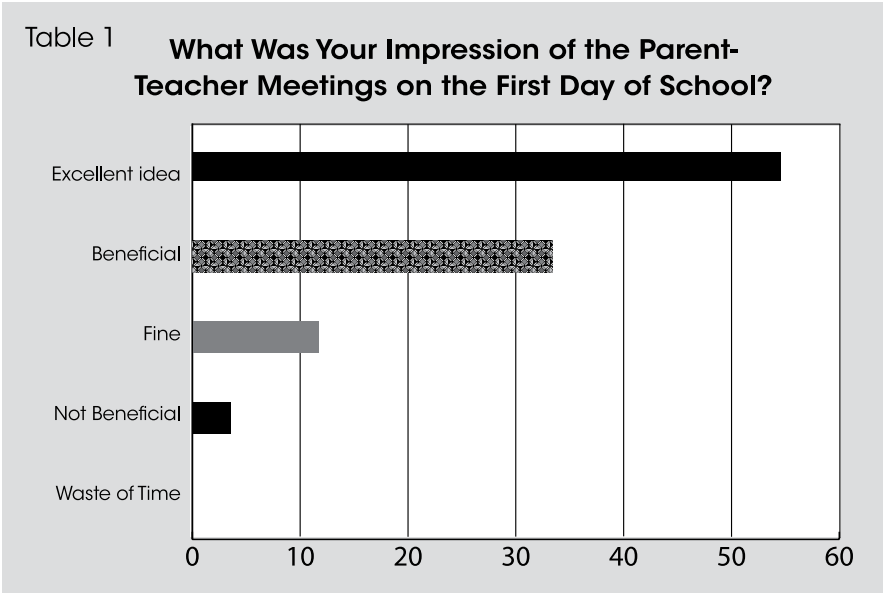
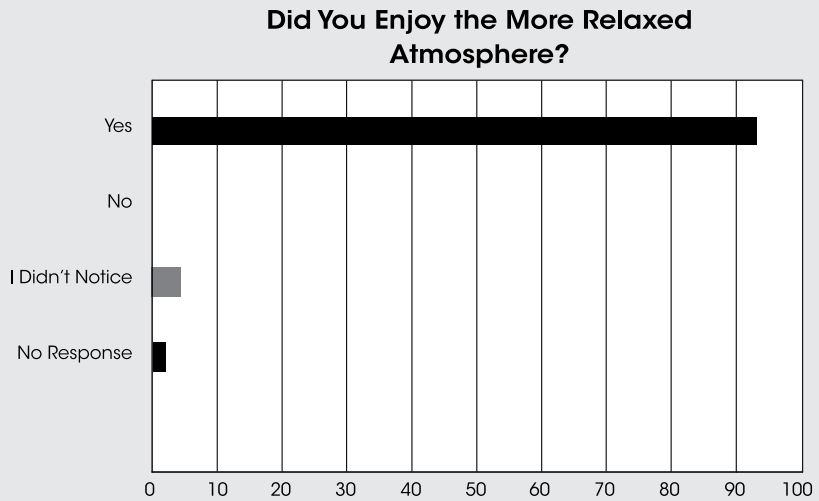


Table 2



Next, the parents were asked if they liked the relaxed atmosphere of Parents Day. Ninety-three percent of the respondents answered yes. None of the parents returned an answer of no. Four percent did state that they didn't notice the relaxed atmosphere while two percent provided no response. (See Table 2, above.)

The third question asked parents to compare the Parents Day meeting with the general classroom meeting with specific regard to how well they are able to connect with the teacher.

Table 3

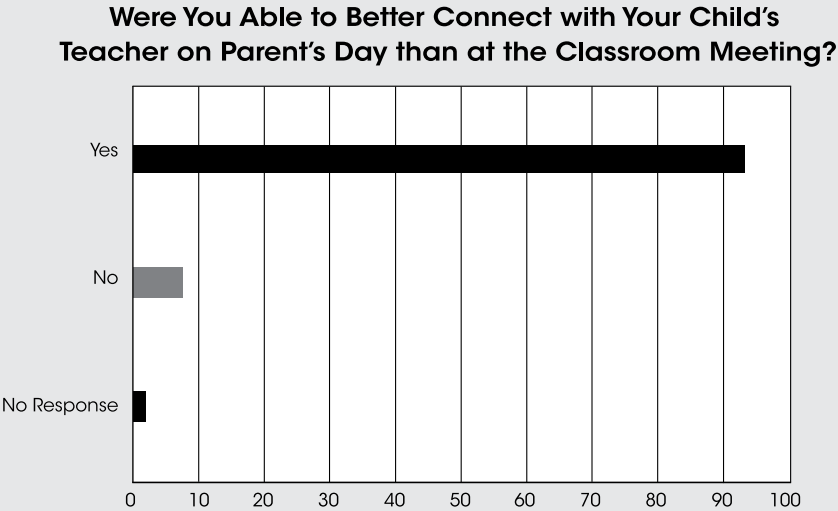
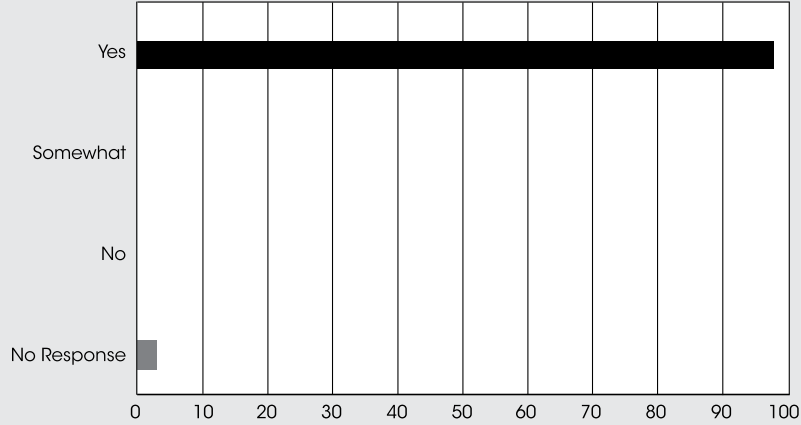


Table 4

**Did You Feel the Teacher Listened to You,
Your Questions and Goals for the Year?**

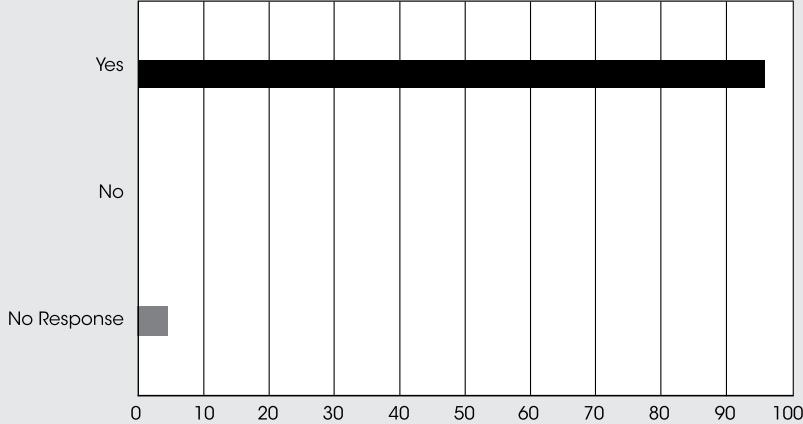


The responses were overwhelmingly positive toward greater connectivity in the one-on-one meetings at Parents Day. Ninety-one percent of the parents responded that they made a stronger connection. Seven percent said no, while the final two percent offered no response to the question. *(See Table 3, previous page.)*

A key goal for the teachers during the Parents Day meetings was to give the parents an attentive ear. The fourth question was directed toward investigating that goal: “Did you feel the teacher listened to you, your questions, and goals for the year?”

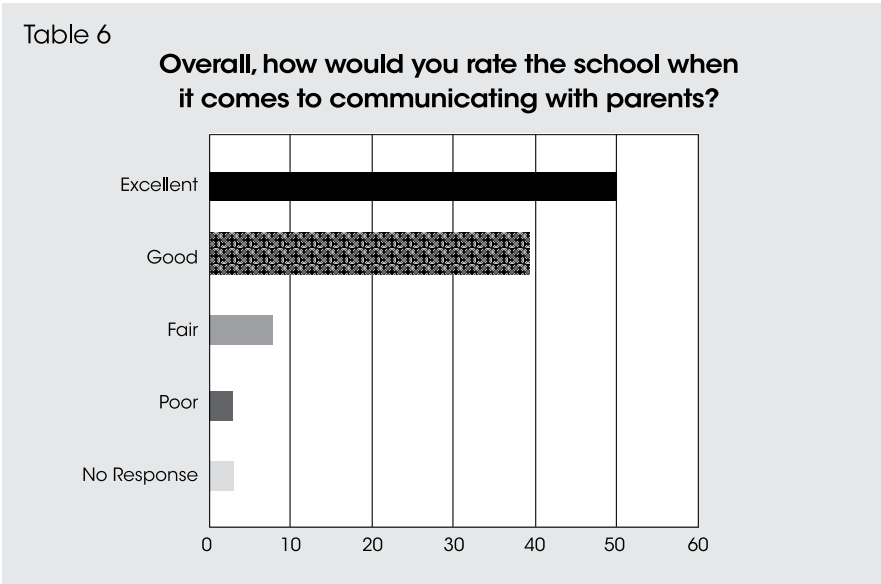
Table 5

**Is Parent’s Day Something the School
Should Do Every Year?**



Ninety-eight percent of the respondents agreed that the teachers did listen, with two percent not responding to the question. (See Table 4, previous page.)

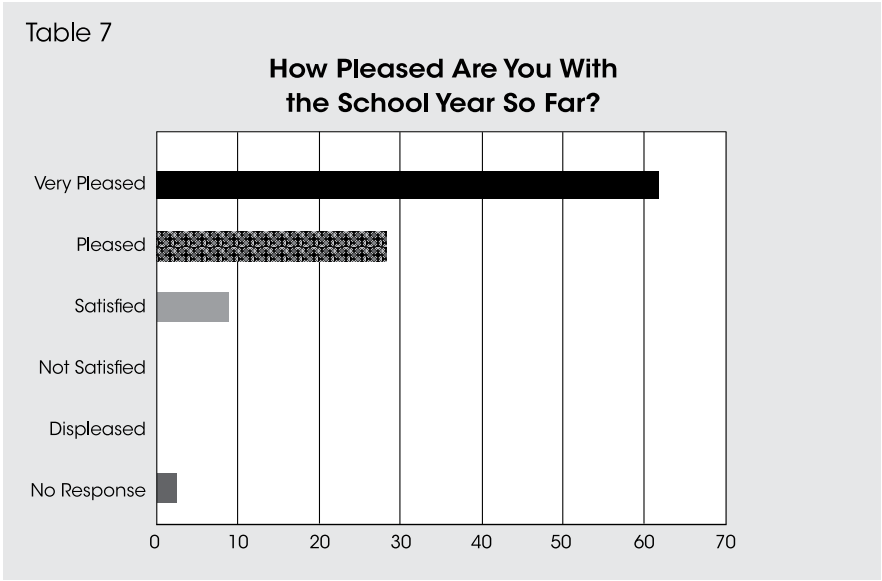
The fifth and final question specifically regarding Parents Day was to ask the parents if they wanted to make it an annual occurrence. Once again, the results were overwhelmingly positive. Ninety-six percent of the parents who filled out the survey desired to make it a yearly event. None of the respondents said no, and four percent did not respond. (See Table 5, previous page.)



In addition to the questions regarding Parents Day, the survey also briefly addressed school communication and parent satisfaction from a larger scope. The first general question, asking for an opinion on the school’s communication practices showed that the parents were generally pleased. Fifty percent of the parents gave the school a communication rating of excellent, along with another thirty-nine percent rating it as good. Seven percent of the respondents called communication fair, while two percent gave both a poor rating, as well as no response. (See Table 6, above.)

The survey concluded by asking parents to share their satisfaction with the school year up to that point. Once again, the responses came back positive. Sixty-one percent of the parents who responded stated that they were very pleased. Twenty-

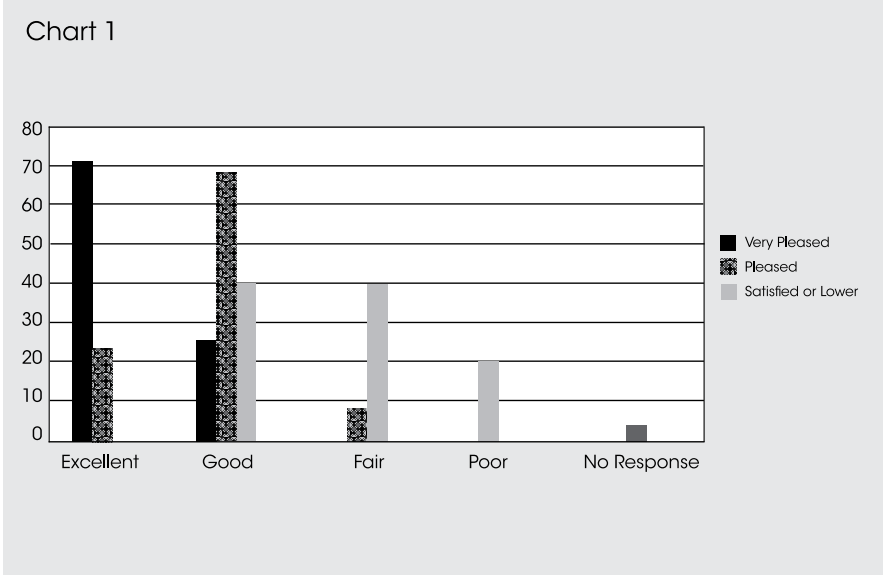
eight percent indicated they were pleased, while nine percent stated that they were satisfied. Once again, two percent of the group did not answer the question. (See Table 7, below.)



Data Analysis

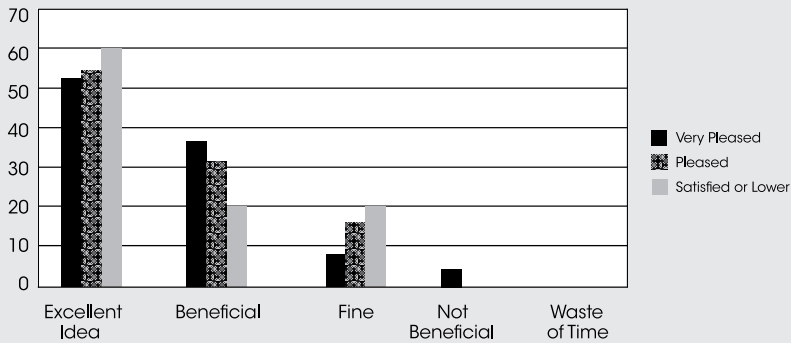
The data produced from the survey supported much of the archival data found by the researcher. One of the subjects analyzed was the connection between the effectiveness of the school’s communication practices and overall parental satisfaction with the school. The research showed that ninety-six percent of the respondents who were very pleased with the school year also rated the school’s overall communication practices as either excellent or good. The parents who answered that they were pleased with the school year also gave the school high marks in communication, with ninety-two percent of the respondents answering excellent or good. It is also worth noting that those parents who were very pleased gave far more answers of excellent than good, and the only response given that was lower than good was a no response. Similarly, the parents who only answered “pleased” to the satisfaction question were also more likely to only give a good response to the effectiveness of communication. Sixty-nine percent of those parents said the communication was good, while only twenty-three percent

offered an excellent rating. The “pleased” category also produced the first response of “fair.” While only five parents rated their satisfaction of the school as “satisfied” or lower, their answers still show an interesting trend: That group produced no answers higher than good, and also was the only group to register a communication rating of poor. The statistics show a strong correlation between parent satisfaction and the perception of the school’s communication practices. (See *Chart 1, below.*)



Respondents to the survey were generally pleased with the idea of the Parents Day meetings, but when the answers to the Parents Day questions were grouped based on the parent’s overall level of satisfaction, some interesting trends emerged. All three categories; “very pleased,” “pleased,” and “satisfied or lower,” had answers of “excellent idea” in over fifty percent of their responses. Surprisingly, there was only one parent who responded that the meeting was not beneficial – and that parent was very pleased with the school year to that point. Another unexpected result in the data came with the higher percentage of parents who thought the Parents Day meetings were an excellent idea, but they answered “satisfied or lower” when asked how felt the year was going. These answers seem to indicate that no matter how pleased or displeased a parent may be, they still desire opportunities to communicate with their child’s school and more specifically the classroom teacher. (See *Chart 2, next page.*)

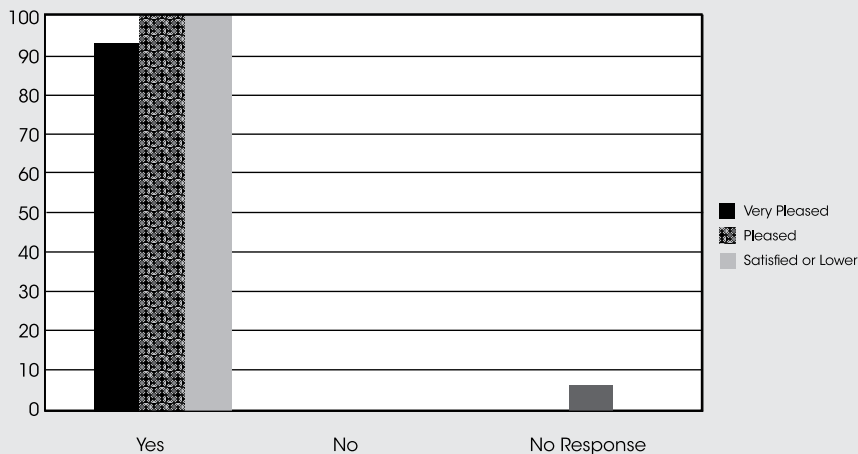
Chart 2



The same trend is found in the comparison of parent satisfaction with the question of whether Parents Day should be held at the start of every year. Again, two parents who did not circle a response to the question yes gave the only responses other than yes, but both stated that they were very pleased with how the school year was going. In the comments provided by those parents, they stated that they were already doing a good job of staying connected with the teachers without the Parents Day meetings. Several parents stated that if the information is important to them, they will take the necessary steps to find answers they need. One parent suggested making the meetings optional. The nearly unanimous support of the Parents Day idea also reconfirmed that parents do value communication with the school, and were willing to take the time to begin the school year in a positive way. The high levels of satisfaction with the format of the day are also an indicator for the teachers to be more open regarding communicating with the families of their students. (*See Chart 3, next page.*)

The statistics show that the parents in the school will be more satisfied with the school as a whole if the lines of communication are open and effective. The benefit for the teachers in the school is a simple one: happy parents are far easier to work with than those who are displeased. With that knowledge, teachers may also be less apprehensive when it comes to communicating

Chart 3



issues with parents earlier—before the problem becomes larger, more complicated, and less manageable.

The surveys showed that the parents within the school approved of Parents Day. Eighty-seven percent of the responses labeled the meetings as either an excellent idea or beneficial. Parents commented that they thought it was a good idea, particularly for families new to the school.

The respondents also appreciated the opportunity to meet one-on-one with their child's teacher. The meetings provided parents with a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere in which they could share concerns with the teachers privately. The parents also noted in their comments that they appreciated the opportunity to get to know the teacher better on a personal level, as well as to set and establish goals for the school year collaboratively. The teachers were also complimented for their willingness to listen to the parents—an excellent foundation on which to build rapport that will pay dividends throughout the school year.

The responses also helped to identify some issues within the school and the structure of Parents Day meetings that could then be addressed among the teachers. One parent commented that the teacher provided a syllabus of what the parent should expect during the school year. This is valuable information, but it does not align itself with the purpose of the meeting which was relation building. This clearly impacted the overall feelings

of that parent in regard to the meetings, as this parent was one of only three respondents who indicated that the Parents Day meeting did not allow them the chance to better connect with the teacher.

Another comment made by a parent clearly showed a key reason why the Parents Day meetings were held. “I haven’t had many experiences with the teachers coming to me personally about a problem. Maybe there are no problems, but I’m waiting to see my kids’ report cards.” The comment reiterates some points previously stated. First, teachers are reluctant to go to the parents and communicate proactively. Even if all is going smoothly, teachers and parents working collaboratively would keep each other regularly informed with information regarding the student’s progress. Next, the parent makes an assumption that “no news is good news.” If that is truly the case, then all may be well. However, parents and teachers should not engage in guessing games when it comes to communicating student achievement. The parent making the comment desires information, and should be provided with regular updates of their child’s academic and behavioral standing. By doing so, the teacher continues the rapport-building process well into the school year. It also prevents the parent from receiving unexpected and unwelcome news at mid-quarter and report card times, eliciting a reactive response toward the teacher that may be less than pleasant or productive. Such a confrontation will erode attempts to build effective lines of communication, sending both teacher and parent straight into the communication gap. Communication eliminates surprises, fosters collaboration, and prevents a plethora of problems.

Eighty-nine percent of the parents who returned the survey felt that the school was doing a good or excellent job of communicating with the parents. Not surprisingly, eighty-nine percent of the respondents also provided answers of “pleased” and “very pleased” to the question: “How pleased are you with the school year so far?” The statistics would indicate that there is a strong connection between school communication and parent satisfaction. Therefore, it is critical that schools be diligent in their communication practices. As the professional in the relationship, it is appropriate that teachers should take the lead in this initiative by finding multiple and diverse ways

to communicate with parents in a manner that is agreed upon mutually and in advance. Initial, positive communication will help to boost the process toward a successful conclusion, but it must be a process in which the teacher engages throughout the school year in order to maintain high levels of educational quality and parental support.

While teachers take the lead in this movement, school administrators should also actively support the teachers on staff in order to make communication a top priority. By establishing a culture that promotes relation-building as well as ensuring that no communication gap exists between the school office and its families, the school principal has an incredible opportunity to model the benefits of effective communication to the entire school community. Likewise, parents also play an important role in this collaboration. They too have a responsibility to communicate openly, honestly, and in a manner that offers a welcome response back to the classroom teacher.

By understanding the importance of positive, intentional lines of communication, especially at the beginning of the school year, both the teacher and the parent are better able to provide a learning environment most conducive to learning. The communication gap will be bridged, and the efforts made will ultimately create a more effective school community, producing highly skilled students. **LEJ**

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Part 3: Basic Skills

Everyone has problems. What's his problem? What's YOUR problem?

In several past issues of *LEJ*, problem solving has been described as dealing with “a question or situation that requires a novel or non-routine reaction on the part of the solver (Polya, 1976).” According to this definition, problems aren't necessarily bad situations, but they do require a certain amount of creativity and flexibility. All teachers experience problems—novel situations—in the course of a day. In the past two issues we've looked at the value of positive attitudes and favorable dispositions in problem solving. We've discussed the similarities of problem solving in mathematics and in the life of a teacher (even when s/he isn't actually teaching mathematics). In this column, we're going to look at the value of basic skills.

Let's begin by looking at an example from elementary school mathematics, and, to make things more interesting, let's go back to a time when calculators weren't readily available in classrooms. Suppose a group of fifth graders wanted to compare the players on their school softball team, perhaps in an effort to decide on a batting lineup. One piece of information that might be useful would be each player's batting average. A crucial mathematical skill in this instance is long division, which is a fairly complicated process for some students.

Calculating the batting average isn't really a problem. It's just a step on the way to the real goal of determining the batting lineup. If the students know the number of times each player was at bat (call that number **b**) and the number of times each player got a hit (call that number **h**), the first job is to know what to do with **b** and **h**. Given a choice of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, hopefully the students will choose division and hopefully they will choose to divide

h into **b** instead of dividing **b** into **h**. The first step in being able to use a basic skill is understanding *when* and *how* to make use of it.

Once the students decide to divide **h** into **b**, they will have to be able to perform the steps of the division algorithm. Students who can perform the division almost automatically will be able to keep their focus on the ultimate problem—designing the batting lineup. For students who struggle with the steps of the division algorithm, the process itself will become the problem. Remembering the steps of long division will take up so much space in short-term memory that these students may lose sight of what they were actually trying to accomplish, or they may become so frustrated by the computation that they give up altogether. Skills need to become almost automatic so that performing them doesn't detract from the problem itself.

Teachers need to develop a wide variety of skills, and these days the list can be overwhelming. As I was preparing to write this column, I checked my own bookshelf to see what topics appear in current literature. The list quickly became unmanageable for a single essay. Teachers must understand multiple intelligences (Armstrong, 1994), brain research (Wolfe, 2001), and constructivist classrooms (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). They must meet the needs of English language learners who are being put into traditional classrooms (Hill and Flynn, 2006), meet the challenges posed by Response to Intervention (Bender and Shores, 2007), and prepare their students for finding a future in a global economy dependent on communications technology (Thornberg, 2002), all the while dealing with local, state, and national standards (Carr & Harris, 2001). I've included some texts on each of these at the end, just in case. Teachers need to know which skills to use and when to use them, and they must be able to use them at a moment's notice.

For the purposes of this column, let's go back to the basics. What are the skills that have made teachers effective? How can these skills be developed in novice teachers and nurtured in veterans?

Implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Activities

Most teacher education programs acquaint the teacher candidates with the theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, Gagné, and

others. During their pre-professional experiences the teacher candidates become acquainted with the implications of these theories. The ability to plan and implement activities, lessons, and curricula that are developmentally appropriate is best developed by a coordinated intersection of theory and practice.

A problem-solving teacher will realize that, even in a single grade classroom, the children are in different stages of intellectual, social, personal, and spiritual development. Recognizing these differences will lead to an environment where each child can grow at a rate that is comfortable and reasonably challenging. Teachers need to learn how children learn and behave, what interests them and what they already know, what causes problems at particular ages, and how to support the children's further growth (Darling-Hammond, 1999). This ability comes with experience, along with pedagogical knowledge.

Implementation of Varied Instructional Strategies

The need for varied instructional strategies for even a small class of children comes from several sources, including gender, exceptionality, ethnicity, and economic status. In each of these cases, a problem-solving teacher will need to step beyond his/her personal preferred learning style and focus instead on the children and their needs.

Developing an arsenal of instructional strategies is an activity that a dedicated teacher will pursue during his/her entire professional life. Recent research in the areas of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), as well as brain research and gender differences (Gurian, 2001), shows the need for continuous professional development. Other challenges for many teachers come from the changing populations in many schools. Even rural and suburban classrooms, where the children once were mostly middle-class and of north European descent, are now populated with a more diverse group of students. Those of us who entered the profession years (or decades) ago must truly be prepared to change our methodology to meet the needs of our students.

Use of Technology

Facility with computers and Internet research has the capability of connecting students with up-to-date sources of information outside of the textbook. Teachers need to be aware

of the benefits and risks of Internet projects. Since this is a tool that many of us didn't have as children, it may require some workshops or individual practice to gain facility with technology.

Research shows that the benefits of using computers and other technology in the classroom go beyond looking up information. In mathematics and science, computers and calculators allow students to pose and solve problems that are more difficult and to interact with real-world data that can be rather messy. There are social benefits as well. Students may be more likely to collaborate with each other when involved in computer projects than they are in other classroom tasks (Cazden, 1985).

Assessment Techniques

A problem solving teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment tools to track and promote the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the children in his/her classroom. Unfortunately recent emphasis on accountability has perhaps taken attention away from using a variety of assessments to guide student development (Guskey, 2003).

Once again, keeping these skills current requires a teacher to continue his/her professional education. Formal testing may still be necessary in today's schools, but a problem solving teacher will use other strategies, such as observations, individual conversations, and shorter activities, to make sure that each child is making progress and to identify children who are in need of intervention.

Classroom Management

Much has been written in recent years about classroom management (for example, Marzano, 2003). Doyle (1986, p. 397) defines *classroom management* as "the actions and strategies teachers use to solve the problem of order in classrooms." This can include developing rules, classroom procedures and organization, discipline, and developing relationships between students and teachers.

Children can benefit from a certain amount of order and reasonable rules, but children are like adults in that they don't always keep things in order and they don't always follow the rules. This is one area where teachers in Lutheran schools have

a distinct advantage with our Law/Gospel approach. We can correct children who misbehave and assign consequences, but we can also remind them of the forgiveness of their loving Savior.

This list of problem-solving skills is not meant to cover every aspect of classroom and school life, but several points should be evident. First of all, teachers must be committed to being life-long learners. The skills that are needed in today's schools weren't presented to teacher candidates who completed their initial programs years ago. The skills that future teachers will need are just emerging in the research. Teachers must continue to read, to attend workshops, and to grow professionally.

Secondly, there is a real benefit when teachers collaborate with other teachers. In particular, novice teachers can learn from veterans, and the older teachers might pick up some fresh ideas from recent graduates.

Finally, teachers in Lutheran schools have the extra benefit of seeing each of their students as a child of God, a child who is "fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14)." That fact alone will motivate most of us to develop our own professional skills in order to serve our Lord and His little ones. **LEJ**

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Administrative Talk ... And Forgive Them Their Trespasses

By Glen Kuck

Let's pretend that Jennifer Smith, a school principal, has a school parent who makes her life as an administrator miserable. The parent is never pleased with what Jennifer does, tries to obstruct her leadership, and is a major source of frustration.

Jennifer doesn't know what she did to merit the treatment she gets from the parent. Her attempts to talk to the parent have been unproductive. Jennifer often finds herself wondering if she should move on to another school. She also wonders if she should—or could—forgive the parent.

Her head tells her to forgive. Her emotions tell her otherwise. She remembers the many religion classes she taught about forgiveness. The parable of the unforgiving servant haunts her. She knows that the sins of the parent against her pale in comparison to the mountain of sins she's been forgiven by God. It seems so easy to forgive during a religion class and so hard in the real world.

She realizes that her bitterness is eating away at her. She knows that this turmoil is stealing the joy from her days and the sleep from her nights. It's distorting her view of life around the school and at home. And knowing that her bitterness isn't hurting the offending parent at all makes it even worse.

I suppose most principals have an albatross to endure similar to Jennifer's. Maybe it's a defiant student. Maybe it's a micro-managing, I'm-smarter-than-you board member. Maybe it's a gossiping teacher or an always-complaining staff member. But somehow through the aggravation brought on by these kinds of individuals, people need to forgive and be forgiven.

In the book *Forgive and Love Again* the authors, John Nieder and Thomas Thompson (1991), note that granting forgiveness isn't so much for the benefit of the person being forgiven as it is for the person doing the forgiving. It's good

spiritually, emotionally, and physically. It lifts a burden. It allows the forgiver to recapture some of the joy that has been lost. That's true whether or not the person being forgiven is even aware that he's been forgiven.

One of the issues that makes it hard for Jennifer to forgive is her feeling that if she forgives, she'd be letting the parent off the hook. She is hurting and wants justice, maybe even vengeance. She wants the offender to know how wrong he has been, and she wants others to know it too. She'd like to plead her case to a jury and let them exonerate her of any wrongdoing while pronouncing a sentence of guilt upon the offending parent. Yet, she knows that there will be no courtroom case. There will be no public decree of guilt. There will be only the lingering hurt caused by the parent.

As Nieder and Thompson point out, the decision to forgive can take place even when the forgiver is still feeling hurt by the acts of the offender. Forgiveness doesn't have to wait for emotional healing to occur. In fact, emotional healing can only begin once the decision to forgive is made. "Forgiving someone is not the result of your emotional healing; it is the beginning of it. You work from forgiveness to healing, not from healing to forgiveness."(p. 32)

As Jennifer weighs the decision of whether or not to forgive, she is perceptive enough to realize that if she forgives, that doesn't mean that she is excusing the wrongdoing of the parent. She isn't lowering herself to a position of subservience. Instead, she's rising to a level that allows her to see things more honorably.

Jennifer sometimes thinks that if only the parent would see the hurt he's causing and be forthright enough to apologize, the issue could be put behind them and forgiveness could begin. But she realizes that waiting for an apology isn't the answer. She's beginning to see that forgiveness can occur without an apology from the offender. And she recognizes that the decision to forgive is for her benefit.

Jennifer isn't naïve. She realizes that her decision to forgive won't mean the end of the problems with the parent. The parent's behavior may not change, but Jennifer's ability to cope will. "Forgiving another does not guarantee that mistreatment will end. Forgiveness frees us to respond in a positive and biblical

way, but don't expect the other person's harmful behavior to simply disappear because you did what was right." (p. 127)

She knows that forgiveness does not mean that she should no longer work to stop the parent's behavior from continuing its harmful course. If the parent's actions are impacting the school and Jennifer's ability to function, she'll need to confront him. But she'll do it out of Christian concern, not vengeance.

Will Jennifer ever get justice? No. Will she ever get revenge? No. Will the situation ever be fully resolved? Probably not. But Jennifer will remain cordial to the parent and will work for mutual understanding. She will enjoy the freedom that comes with forgiveness. She'll be closer to her Lord as a result of the experience, and she'll better appreciate the forgiveness she's been granted by God. Obviously, the same is true for principals in general.

And conversely, only God knows the myriad times the people around a school need to forgive their principal. **LEJ**

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Secondary Sequence...Technology's Price

by Kevin Dunning

The biggest obstacle to school change is our memories. - Dr.Allen Glenn

It may be every child's worst nightmare: a grandparent, parent, teacher or other older adult telling stories about how hard it was when they were growing up and how easy kids these days have it. "I walked to school in freezing (or blazing) temperatures five miles uphill both ways."

Certainly the stories told by our elders have some value as they transmit the culture from one generation to the next. But one thing is for certain, progress is a good thing. While one can argue the merits of whether television shows from the 1950s were better than the current fare, it is hard to imagine anyone arguing that a 12" black and white screen surrounded by a 200 lb case is preferable to a high definition 52" flat screen. The modern experience is certainly much richer.

Surprisingly, however, many people make that argument when it comes to using computers in schools. If you were in school before the mid-'80s, it is unlikely you had much experience with desktop computers. For many teachers mid to late in their careers, their first experience with computers may have involved IBM punch cards. That used to be the way data was transmitted. My first personal computer used a cassette tape to store data. Our status as digital immigrants may color our approach to the use of technology in school: I survived without it and I've turned out alright.

Perhaps the same arguments were made when someone suggested schools move to paper and pencils rather than marking up a slate. This change had disaster written all over it. Students might write things on their own or doodle when the teacher was talking. Social interactions would suffer if rambunctious boys could no longer dip the pigtails of young ladies in the inkwell.

No one who works with their hands bemoans the advent of the power drill or screwdriver. Yet

when it comes to schools and children, communities are too often reluctant to put the best tools in the hands of our students.

In the classroom, computers, Smartboards, digital projectors, and DVD players just add to the tools teachers have at their disposal that enhance student learning. Tools help you build things; they are means—not ends. We should be using technology to help students learn in ways they find engaging, not ways we find comfortable teaching.

Military analysts often say we prepare to fight the last war. Educators need to be wary of preparing students for our past rather than their future. In a world of increasing global competitiveness, the knowledge and skills needed for the future are remarkably different than what students needed even twenty years ago. We will fail them unless we are prepared to bear the burden of providing a foundation for success. And it will be a burden. A computer costs more than a #2 pencil. But a #2 pencil cannot connect to a physics professor at MIT who can communicate to our students the latest breakthroughs or provide a real-time connection to astronauts in the space station.

Lutheran secondary schools are uniquely positioned to make the best use of the available technological resources. Often with smaller enrollments, the financial burden of providing access may not be as big a hurdle. Just as parents are asked to pay the cost of textbooks for their students and do so without much objection, the time is coming soon when laptops, PDAs or even cell phones will be as ubiquitous as the three-ring binder. Parents' primary concern won't be the cost of technology, but rather to what degree technology has become a part of the school's environment. Schools without will pay a price in enrollment and reputation.

Every Lutheran High School is about quality. Any school committed to the message of the Gospel must also be devoted to its communication in a way that engages the learner. If the message of the Gospel is infused in the teaching of math, science, French and physical education, every teacher's obligation is to deliver instruction as if their students' lives depended on it because, eternally, it does. **LEJ**

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Multiplying Ministries... “Spokes” Persons of Hope

by Rich Bimler

Picture this: Twenty college students leaving Central Park in New York City on May 22 on a 4000 mile bike trek to Seattle.

Seventy-two days later: Twenty weary road warriors arriving in Seattle on August 2, after over two months on the road through nineteen states.

Why? Because they had the hope and the goal of raising \$100,000 for Cancer Research and Programs, and they did it.

The Illini 4000 Bike Team, from the University of Illinois, accomplished their goal because they had hope, in themselves and hope in people who would support and encourage them through this unique undertaking. The Vision Statement that spurred them on is:

“Five million diagnosed each year. One lost to cancer every minute. But there is hope. For the families, researchers, and doctors committed to the fight, we pedal. By the hope, love, and support of the people we meet...We Keep Going.”

During their cross-country trek, these twenty pioneers stayed in church basements and on school floors. They supported each other through wind and rain and even flooded highways. They laughed, they cried, they learned, they grew...and they appreciated a shower whenever they could find one.

What has touched me so much about this venture is the hope, the passion, and the determination of these young people. In a culture that often gives little or no attention to this age group, except when trouble occurs, these individuals “Just Did It.” No fanfare, no big promotion, no slick advertising... they just went out and raised \$100,000 for Cancer Research and Programs.

They also interviewed and visited cancer patients and survivors along their route. They spent time with friendly folks who hosted them in churches and schools. They brought hope to

hundreds, young and old, who they met along the way. So often, they heard the comment, “God bless you. I can’t believe you’re doing what you’re doing.”

This band of bicyclers raised much more than \$100,000. These spirited spokespersons also provided hope to cancer survivors, to their families, to their churches, and to each other.

They believed in themselves, that they actually could make a difference in their world...and they did. Listen in to some of their conversations after the ride:

“...I will never cease to be amazed by simple acts of kindness that we experienced. Strangers from all walks of life opened up their private spheres of their life, their homes, their places of worship, and community centers, to help our team. In a time when it seems as though we, the 300 million people who make up this country, have grown further apart from one another and write off strangers, it is moments like these that give me hope.”

And may I add, “Me too.”

These young people matured in the process as well. Listen in on this comment: “Yes, this ride is about raising funds and awareness for cancer research, but it is also an opportunity for us riders to reflect and think about the future. For those of us who are recent (and unemployed) graduates, this statement couldn’t be more true.”

What else does one do for 72 days, biking an average of 70 miles a day, sleeping on concrete floors, eating pizzas and peanut butter (and ice cream now and then)? For one thing, there was much time for reflection. Here’s one sound bite: “I don’t know if I can speak for my peers, but I will admit that I am afraid. I am afraid of ending back at home. I am afraid of slogging through a job that I hate, purely for financial gain. It is as if returning home somehow means that I have failed, four years of college and I’m back where I started. What have I accomplished? How can I make a real difference in the lives of others? Maybe I should have been a business major.”

Why am I sharing this story in this education journal? Because these twenty college students are the types of people that we have touched and mentored and taught and encouraged and prayed for. Perhaps we do not see many of them in our worship services, but they are close around us, in our churches and communities, and in our own homes. They have so much to

offer. They have so many gifts. They want to change the world, and they will...one pedal at a time.

Most young people will not be going on a 4000 mile bike trip to raise \$100,000 for Cancer research (I just rode 5 miles on my bike this morning and I can hardly move). But the young people around us are willing and able to make a difference in this culture that is for sure. It might not be through a Church-sponsored ministry, but I am convinced more than ever that the Lord is actively involved in blessing all sorts of projects and experiences in which young people are involved. I, for one, need to invest even more of my efforts and energies into serving the Lord by encouraging our students and young friends to be bold and pro-active in making a difference in peoples' lives.

Thank you, Illini 4000, for not only spending your summer riding 4000 miles for Cancer Research. But more importantly, thank you for being models and examples to us adults who sometimes get weary and worried and woe-filled because of all the struggles of life. Thanks for being our teachers. Thanks for inspiring us to "keep going, one mile at a time."

You really are "Spokes'persons of Hope." God bless you, in Jesus' name.

(P.S. Thanks for allowing me to share this story. My grandson, Matt Cillick, was one of the riders. We are proud of you, Matt. Love ya', Gramps.) **LEJ**

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